

The situation in Northern Niger became increasingly dangerous in 2014, as militants have moved more frequently along the country's borders with Mali and Libya and Nigeria's Boko Haram moved its base close to the Niger border. On October 3, nine Nigerien peacekeepers were ambushed in Mali, but President Mahamadou Issoufou stated that his troops will continue to stay in the country. On October 9, the French army attacked a convoy of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) militants in Niger delivering weapons to Mali, and arrested some of its fighters. Attacks on October 31 near a camp for Malian refugees resulted in the deaths of nine Nigerien policemen. On November 19, another attack on Niger's western border with Mali led to gunfight with the Nigerien army.

In June 2014, an arrest warrant was issued for Niger's parliamentary speaker and leading opposition figure Hama Amadou, for suspicion of participation in child trafficking. As many as 20 people, including high-level officials and Amadou's wife, were arrested in the case. Amadou fled the country in August and maintains that charges against him are politically motivated. He had turned against president Issoufou in 2013.

Already one of the world's poorest countries, Niger has been ravaged by extreme food shortages since a 2009 drought. In addition, 1,300 cases of cholera in 2014 have resulted in more than 51 deaths, while health workers issued a warning of a malaria outbreak in September. Niger is still home to about 50,000 Malian refugees, as well as 12,000 Nigerians who more recently have fled the incursion of Boko Haram into their villages.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 26 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

A 2010 military coup that removed increasingly authoritarian president Mamadou Tandja from power led to the adoption of a new constitution that year. Drafted in broad consultation with civil society, the charter reinstated executive term limits, curbed executive power, and provided amnesty for the coup leaders. Under the constitution, the president is elected by popular vote for up to two five-year terms. Members of the 113-seat, unicameral National Assembly, who also serve five-year terms, are elected through party-list voting in eight multimember regional constituencies and eight single-member constituencies reserved for ethnic minorities.

Presidential, legislative, and municipal elections were held in January 2011 to replace the transitional government established by the junta and restore civilian rule. The junta forbade its members and representatives of the transitional government from running for office. The Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), headed by Issoufou, won 37 legislative seats. The pro-Tandja National Movement for a Developing Society (MNSD)—headed by former prime minister Seini Oumarou—placed second with 26 seats, while former prime minister Hama Amadou's Nigerien Democratic Movement for an African Federation took 25. Five smaller parties divided the remainder. In the first round of the presidential election, Issoufou and Oumarou emerged as the top two candidates; Issoufou then claimed victory with 58 percent of the vote in a March runoff election. Both the presidential and legislative elections were declared free and fair by international observers, despite minor irregularities. The PNDS and MNSD won the majority of positions across the country in local elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

After the 2010 military coup, Amadou returned from exile, three former legislators were released from jail, and there was a decrease in harassment of opposition politicians. Since assuming power in 2011, Issoufou has appointed former opponents and members of civil society to high positions in government to foster inclusivity, and a reshuffling of the government in 2013 continued this pattern, though it left most key posts in the hands of Issoufou's allies.

The constitution reserves eight special constituency seats to ensure ethnic minorities' representation in the National Assembly. Such minorities, including the nomadic population, continue to have poor access to government services. Under a 2002 quota system, political parties must allocate 10 percent of their elected positions to women.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Corruption remains a serious problem in Niger, and observers have raised concerns regarding uranium-mining contracts. However, the 2010 constitution provides for greater transparency in government reporting of revenues from the extractive industries as well as for the declaration of personal assets by government officials, including the president. In 2011, the government created the High Authority to Combat Corruption and opened an anticorruption hotline. In the same year, Issoufou was the target of a foiled assassination attempt thought to be motivated by his crackdowns on corruption in the military.

In October 2014, former President Tandja was stripped of his legal immunity and charged with corruption, as authorities began investigating the disappearance of nearly 400 billion francs (\$800 million) of public money that Tandja had claimed were in the state treasury when he was overthrown. Transparency is weakly enforced. Niger was ranked 103 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 30 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16

In 2010, the National Assembly adopted a new press law that eliminated prison terms for media offenses and reduced the threat of libel cases that journalists had faced under Tandja. In 2011, Issoufou became the first head of state to sign the Table Mountain Declaration, which calls on African governments to promote press freedom. The media are largely allowed to publish political facts and critiques without interference, but journalists still sometimes face police violence while covering protests. Journalists are also prosecuted for libel in some instances. In January 2014, four journalists were detained by police without charge but released within days; the authorities had accused the journalists of defamation, false accusation, and "appeals to hatred and violence." Justice Minister Marou Amadou declared the detentions justified, stating that the government would not tolerate "calls to insurrection, hatred, or a coup." The government does not restrict internet use, though less than 2 percent of the population has access.

Freedom of religion is generally respected in this overwhelmingly Muslim country. In the aftermath of the 2010 coup, both Muslim and Christian leaders worked with the junta to restore peace and democracy.

Academic freedom is guaranteed but not always observed in practice.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

Constitutional guarantees of freedoms of assembly and association are largely upheld. However, police sometimes used force to break up labor and other protests during 2014, including protests in July calling for greater transparency with regards to uranium-mining contracts with French firm Areva. The government does not restrict the operations of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), though a lack of security in the north prevents such groups from accessing or functioning in the region. While the constitution and other laws guarantee workers the right to join unions and bargain for wages, over 95 percent of the workforce is employed in subsistence agriculture and small trading.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and courts have shown some autonomy in the past, though the judicial system has at times been subject to executive interference. The Ministry of Justice supervises public prosecutors, and the president has the power to appoint judges. Judicial corruption is fueled partly by low salaries and inadequate training. Prolonged pretrial detention is common, and police forces are underfunded and poorly trained. Prisons are characterized by overcrowding and poor health conditions.

Insecurity continues to plague many parts of the country, and several people have been kidnapped by groups such as AQIM. In October, French forces, in coordination with the Nigerien government, intercepted and destroyed an AQIM convoy in northern Niger that was transporting weapons from Libya to Mali.

The crisis in neighboring Mali led to an influx in 2012 of some 60,000 Malian refugees, of whom 50,000 remained in Niger in 2014, as well as 16,000 Nigerian refugees fleeing the situation in Northern Nigeria more recently. This influx has raised pressure on food supplies.

While two ethnic groups, Hausa and Djerma, still dominate many government and economic positions, minority groups are represented and their rights are protected by law. Same-sex sexual activity is not illegal in Niger, but same-sex relationships are not recognized and there is no protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation. No NGOs work on LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) rights in Niger.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of movement and property rights and these are generally respected throughout the country, though bribery remains an issue for both.

Although the 2010 constitution prohibits gender discrimination, women suffer discrimination in practice. Family law gives women inferior status in property disputes, inheritance rights, and divorce. Sexual and domestic violence are reportedly widespread. Female genital mutilation was criminalized in 2003 and has declined, but it continues in a small percentage of the population.

While slavery was criminalized in 2003 and banned in the 2010 constitution, slavery remains a problem in Niger, with up to 43,000 individuals still in slavery. Niger remains a source, transit point, and destination for human trafficking. Despite a 2010 antitrafficking law and a five-year antitrafficking plan, investigation and prosecution efforts remains weak. More than 20 high-profile arrests, including the agriculture minister and wives of other prominent politicians, were conducted between June and August 2014 related to child trafficking.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)